

**WHELM: A BOOK OF POEMS**

by

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# **The University of Utah Graduate School**

## **STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL**

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## ABSTRACT

*Whelm* is part wildness and part witness, part love song and part lament. It is an elegy to former times and selves that admits fear of a future where humanity, community and strangeness are lost to manmade systems, and is also an ode to oddity and intricacy. These poems attempt to understand how difficult it is to be a thinking, feeling, speaking being in a largely impenetrable world—both wordless and written over with various conflicting narratives. In this manuscript, people are engulfed by forces larger than they, such as natural disasters and love, and are equally overwhelmed by their own feelings, desires and ideas. A central concern of the manuscript is figuring out how to live an authentic life or have real intimacy in a world that rapaciously wants to name, categorize, and commodify us. I conceive of language as an intervention, as textured and complex in a way that frees us from abbreviation and generalization. This manuscript suggests—as Bataille and others have before me—that there is violence in the ideal, that cruelty often arises out of category-become-hierarchy, and that perhaps the only conceivable solution to our flooding is flooding . . . to resist being capsized by giving into the roiling mess of our hearts and minds by admitting the endless cataclysms of our love, our inimitable eccentricities, and the ineffaceable plurality of being. This manuscript is informed by these wayward enactments of grief and loss, and by what Czeslaw Milosz called “A Poetics of Hope,” wherein poets remain hopeful despite an intense awareness of the dangers menacing what we love. The world is not comfortable, containable, settled, or transparent, nor is what our own perspectives and collective narratives do with that world. I return to the truths of

particularity and plurality, to detritus, explosion, fracture, to trying to cut through doxa and cliché to attempt to articulate the complexity of existing in the world, let alone a world increasingly ravaged by the forces of the market, industrialization, and large-scale mechanized warfare, wherein we are often very remote witnesses.

You cannot fold a flood  
And put it in a drawer,—

*Emily Dickinson*

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## HURRICANE BIRDS

In the eye of the storm we came  
up out of basements and found sea birds in our yards—  
gulls and terns stockpiling debris, and frigate birds gliding  
flawless over the interstate. A white ibis crawled out of  
the gutter and loosed its looped limbs into the air.  
Petrels and doves swarmed wet parking lots.  
What glistened overwhelmed us, swallows rising  
like a sheet over the injured

## HOLDING

At night something blue  
brushes over the laundry.

Our house holds our dishes and  
necks away from the come-hither  
chroma of stars.

The lamp flounces a little  
skirt of light onto the dresser.

You are naked, kneeling  
by the bath, your palm  
under the water as if to  
stop it.

Our house holds many mirrors.  
Our house holds drawers  
of thumbtacks and ink.

The moon is not a marrying  
but in it everything a chamber,  
remedial—

Our house is saturated  
with carpet. I hear the hum of a sky  
that scissors elsewhere. Sea  
sound of unfastening.

Our house holds portraits snug  
against its chest.

I am pulling out  
bobby pins. It is an era  
of subtraction.

From outside looking in, our house  
is a gash between curtains.

But you are warm,  
lifted, cupped, the water

hugging you in half.

## WHY DELUGE

*Forget, forget, and let us live now / only this*  
—Rilke

## I.

because fruits have no mouths  
you follow me into the pelted fields  
where there is no way out of this—

storm windows sparking,  
the delta splintered within us like veins

we touch our flinty skins together, but nothing  
leaks inside aftermath, my pining deep enough  
to trawl, my knees caught in the damp twine  
of our historic sleeping bag

my skirt soaks up the whole of the landscape,  
ankles damp and root-like in love

forehead unmeasured—there is no use  
in asking why we are grown over, at this  
point adjourned

somewhere the sloths so gloss  
& grown-over & holding on

## II.

because lakes  
lean in

to hear the earth's alibi

## III.

because *longing leads too*  
I stare too long  
watch them throng  
feel myself fasten; how often  
the past to the present,  
an outer I.V., a trembling?

*often into vagueness—*  
into the lawn of starlings,  
& trickle like an answer and  
have I tried to safety pin  
felt the rain drip through my hair

## IV.

because time is all  
about the drag  
of water through  
space

for semblance. it makes a lace  
divisible, a lace pretty, a night  
full of flickering hooks

nature's applause echoes over glass  
and I feel your forearm roll  
like a wave over my hip though  
you are far-flung and, as far as I  
know, still solid

V.

because the river nearby, pulsing.

depressions fill & palindrome the children—a foot  
casting out a foot, a face perched above a face

and we catch the chorus of discrete

beads falling into our haphazard  
whereabouts and beveled shoulders,

for joy cannonball into our reflections

VI.

because I was once wet, fishling & fetus & fog,

and while we are watching the rain fall as signs

into the buoyed ships of stamen, particles are

gathering and ascending, swamps assembling again

the earth—who's to say we will see any coming at all?—

I hear you breathing but you are not here. The earth tries

to embrace me, ankles first. O gleaming birth of buildings,

palms, and hoods! I begin to see where the sun has stained

open a spot to sit

VII.

because the moon is a tranquil eye upon a less tranquil world  
and my body is an island tugged in every direction out to sea,  
my resolve the thin strip of coast that tides lift up over and envelop.

shells clink against my city wrists      and your voice is in every shell



and your hands are all the wetness  
to hang in the air      because our breath is too heavy  
and ablution seeps into us

through wounds, water tangled in the foreclosure of rocks, the mind

or it sways back and forth for 3,000 years in the sea, dusts our things  
with the promise of salt, pulls us through the thin wiry stems of moss—

## BACKYARD

The moon licks one thing, lacquers another,  
is powerfully soft-spoken, turn heads of  
                    lettuce porcelain,  
and sometimes within the moon's bone china  
dogs pierce the dome of darkness with a howl.  
Each of us delicate & irrelevant under layers of  
blankets, shellac, the cold steel of the grill perplexed.  
Metallic insects at work, earthworms digging tunnels,  
churning the soil. The laundry damp and glowing on the line,  
and your dog pinned to her spot of grass unaware of  
the two teenage hands that drop her eight pups,  
                    one by one, in the pool, just to see  
how they struggle, then don't, their yet-unopened eyes  
laced with chlorine, their small bodies drifting  
                    down, through, into  
the amniotic sac of the world,  
moonlight pulled over everything like a television  
screen, what is real, difficult in the sheen.

# THE ECONOMIST'S DAUGHTER

Wherever she goes, trees follow, flash their blank  
greenback hands in deaf applause, nervous

excitement, as if to flag her down or surrender,  
as if to imply a state of emergency, carve up the wealth

of light, but she walks through the forest  
that clumps around her like it's the biggest nothing

to note. Despite this ticker-tape parading,  
she skips to the slow messy churning

of her own heart. She shies away from addition  
but gathers lilacs in her skirt, arcs her back into

a bridge to broaden her own custody. She seems  
confident that her interest will not falter.

She tells her father that in her dream there was enough  
water for everyone to go swimming, but

he only hears a faint fraction. He's too busy  
listening to registers humming, money heaping

like bees to the hive. Her dreams may be instrumental  
since he's always on the lookout for an apt metaphor—

"The economy is a small girl in the blight of morning;  
it's an ocean, the tossing about of slippery schools

of glittery fish; it's butter—smeared, whipped, melting.  
The economy is bubble, crater, rocket, a green shoot."

She has gone outside again, into the glut of spindly things,  
amid the dim cloying microbes poised over the dumb yard.

He's trying to coin just the right phrase, to say succinctly  
what we are about to lose. He's pacing, thinking things

can't get more fraught, but when he looks out the window  
he sees all the leaves suddenly drop down around her

softly like play money. It is the most beautiful schism,  
a plunder he can not name. He can see in her eyes—

all spark and slalom—that she is not easily enumerated.

She is a bright light in a landscape of numbers;  
when she smiles the zeroes flower into lust.

## THE FLOOD IS A FIGURE OF SPEECHLESSNESS

you have noticed all of our syllables are  
wet, mist of eyes. hydrant-worship. maybe

they can hear the glaciers

tipping, water rising. maybe  
the ovary-nouns by their own de-  
vice map the water in

our bodies dispersing like shrapnel.

the bomb contacts no one, but rattles  
blood through catacombed cells—

flash flood. maybe *wet* is another word  
for *without*. adrift. our shoulder blades

are perfect flotsam—rest your head here.

when a flood flails down—if there are gods  
up there—they inevitably try to see themselves

in the flickering dark muck of it,  
bright unforgiving

mirror, but there is only glare.

you have noticed that things wash up  
from an unobserved but massive

sea. that your wrists move like moon

snails. maybe when you cry you break  
with form, end up rippling through

the gills of a sting-ray.

## DIORAMA: MURANO

*What is the whole place but a curiosity-shop, and what  
are you here for yourself but to pick up odds and ends?*

—Henry James

Here, where the streets are stalked by streets of water,  
where everything seems to sway in its impossible cup,  
the vendors of memory sit in their stores of glass, their eyes  
clear as marbles. Lampposts never turned off that we may  
glint our way through the tiny unexpected murmurs of trinkets  
that promise to intervene in death, to snag it slightly on  
the brittle sail, or hoard minutes in corked bottles, the air sequestered  
as long as there is a delicate ship in the center of everything,  
as long as our brains stay sanctum-still.

Somewhere the hands of children glue together bits  
in a shoebox : diorama, aquarium, people hushed  
in their copy. Train of glass, vessel of glass, peacock  
of glass, bowl of vivid glass fish, glass sun of no center,  
glass ring, city of glass, violinist of glass caught on  
one subtle note—the breakability of

everything wholly unambiguous. Light cuts  
through each thing on its own terms. The menagerie  
moves as slowly as your body turning. The vaporetto light  
touches through the fog the port. My arms are full  
of the carefully wrapped, and I say to myself—linger  
as if you yourself are underwater, something tossed.

Every square and canal is lined with display cases,  
but behind them a tank of withstanding—the translucence  
more than we can bear, all that we want  
to own. The tiny glass horse emerges from the hot wand,  
and surgeons everywhere are making origami flowers  
in our barely bodies, frail but possible.

## CENTRALIA, PA

The ground is susceptible to suddenly sinking—  
a fire tunnels through to the dirt from where

the earth's unassailable veins ventriloquize silence,  
blue mouths blackened with coal dust, unswayable

as pigs from pig feed. But the fire does not  
hunger, know fullness, is like the blood in

our bodies, just there, driving. No map, but  
amplitude. Attempts to smother the fire were

unsuccessful. The fire is saturated with fire,  
will not stop until stopped, chunks of granite

against its ghosted cheeks, calming to death.  
The flames see nothing, smell nothing, just fold out

deep beneath our feet, forty-six years and burning.  
Near the detour in Ashland a cemetery is singed

from the bottom up, as if bones were another  
of nature's vocabularies. Where there was a church

pinned down with clasped hands, there is a fissure  
hissing. The highway through town is cracked open.

Something is being born. A family stops, gets out  
of the car, leaves it running clink & hum. The mother

bends down, flinches from the smell. The father and  
daughter and younger daughter and son all bend down,

touch the road, find the earth warm as pancakes on  
their palms through two feet of asphalt. The trees'

curtains are drawn, what's left—bleached, and this dissolves  
in a float of sulphur. The older daughter feels nauseated,

doesn't know the feeling. They depart slowly—like those remote  
residents, fumes flooding their backyards—drive down

61 toward Dark Water, PA. They say that the ground  
collapsed under a man, that he clung to the roots of trees.

Most people left with government grants in hand, their eyes

as vacant as old coal shafts, memory stripped to echoes,  
but a few remained in single row homes without rows,  
fire bleeding through their veins.



THERE WILL COME SOFT RUIN  
after *Sara Teasdale*

that we were present in the gone-ing, dawn  
wiping away the green night vision, the pawn

shops shattered with lust. that we hunkered down  
in our couches, hit play, skimmed the day's drown

-ings. that the hydrangeas silently hemorrhaged truce  
while we mechanized, were thrilled about the cruise.

that the fences hum and deepen, become zones,  
the canaries—cage-float—dimming the neon bones

in our 10mm thick tanks & skins—shark, combatant.  
that the singing is singed, mothers picking off lint,

nerves. that the grounds will come, rise up around us  
like a gown of inescapable mass, mudslide couture, fuss

of forensics—rigor: we the swallow, tremulous fragment.

## LA FILLE FRAGILE

Her silver waist went out to sea  
like petal debris, rain-tattered *ma chère parfois*

and my feet lessened into shore  
so not even the biggest mirror could reach me

Now the sky sparks with remembering  
her eyes afloat in the darkness

*mon autre moi*, my sad little nuptial glance

Who will risk more extremely the south of my sorrows?  
Admittedly you sleep whereas your smile—

*Nous avons dormi dans les beaux bâtiments;*  
light is remorse and what fades repairs her

Clearly, you very little till now not to be phase of phase  
and the mascara is sad. She wilts the way I clutch purple  
elderberries in my shirt

*J'espère coïncider*

How to risk more extremely *la nuit*? A small bridal fall?  
How to make wither the quiet black city she left?

You play the door. I will play cumulus. *La musique fait.*  
The song of lamp flowers festoons foreheads as they pass.  
Probably rightly you the ailing repair, you the light of regret

*Ne pas Ne pas ma chère parfois*

If the peaches fall and disappear  
where the peonies parcel out the moon  
and our fingers scatter like lightning  
bugs, *des serviettes oranges pour l'occasion*

Elsewhere magic acquits us

Obviously *il y avait beaucoup d'oiseaux*,  
obviously we sleep underneath amplifying

departure

## SOFT PALIMPSEST

the forecast kisses my cheeks

with upheaval, says *here it comes*

and I feel a little tingly, sky darkening to slate, then brightening to white

the thrill of undoing and hurdle

pouring over our windows

cans of soup and wax beans just roll off the shelf

and then it starts—the slow

wet trickle of love,

the weight of what's above us divvied up, an unfamiliar parent dismantled

the spilled milk of it

who doesn't need an intervention?

beautiful bright excuse

to see the accumulation of evidence

as answer

to time—soft open structure filling soft open structure—

the trees mock ups of trees, branches the cups that runneth over

even the windshields are cocooned in material silence

the gauntlet has been thrown: to dare romp, to toss

oneself, to fall

and let the cold recalculate you, to let the landscape adhere,

drip into your carpet

the street lights spread cellophane and we know

our cars will need to be shoveled out (mini-drama

of loss and recovery) but not yet

first the brilliant long pause before utility

it's a recap of the present—the shadowy shapes

of everything traced as if by the hand of a lover, music ensnared in  
the strange hubris of solids

our own hands covered for protection  
seem instead—like little Christos—suddenly more  
present, closer, plump, alive

my eyes begin to water

because the gathering gods are hard at work,  
insuring each exposed thing is spooned

THE BLUE-GRAY BODY OF THE ZAMBEZI

The river is full of albescent bodies  
floating, water tossed with light,  
    lumbering undone  
in the earliest arcana of submersion.

At night the bloat  
    of hippopotami sinks  
into the earth, envoy  
    of a galaxy draping  
its animal counterpart, the massive  
mouths slowly tearing up shortgrass,  
hunger chasmal.

Now—sunlight a kind of king-  
fisher—these creatures, amassed,  
    dial back the flow  
of the Zambezi with bulk.

Each bull, cow, calf born underwater,  
drifts silently through the glass of under,  
    river horses galloping  
through the ambient  
cords of water lilies strung  
    gutless between  
surfaces.

A cow and her newborn stray  
from the others. For hours they blink  
& plunge & drink & defecate,  
but now—the sun, a dim commute—the dominant  
bull rushes through the quietus, opens  
his mouth four feet wide, bites down  
on the calf. The mother tries, but he thrashes,  
releases the blue-gray body draining, loosened  
bricks of blood filling  
    the Zambezi.

The bull wallows. The sun does not bargain  
with the bleak: one new body floating lifeless down-  
stream, as human as ascendancy.

TRYST

We are all addendum,  
the pangaea of our bodies knotted  
above linen facsimiles  
of our movement,  
adagio the others that stir  
with our thrusts—  
the bodies that have dented our bodies,  
distant seas we smell in each other's hair.

We pull the air like winches between us  
& I know only that I would let you

dismantle me.

when you move in me I can hear  
the dead trying to tear themselves  
from inconsequence,  
like us and it is not the body but  
the bodying forth that titillates me.

What if I could look at you and not

wonder how the universe was  
constructed?  
swarms & disperses? If I could desire

nothing? But occurrence? Our two spines  
form a bank in the dark  
that no one will cross  
over to get to the raging,  
famished river.

We walk back and forth between  
the past and the future, carrying the present  
as two small pools of saliva in our mouths.

Will the impending  
silence record everything?

We linger  
into morning, and discover: we have not  
tinged anything, we have not yet disappeared.

## FORAGE

before barbed wire it was easy to walk  
 away from cruelty and hunger to move  
 like wind over the nearly uninhabited earth  
 bursting with fruit the wheezing of deer  
 mushrooms expanding inside of wet nights  
 trout gliding knives downstream but cutting  
 nothing to the next best thing forage  
 and forget there is nothing primal about  
 hoarding about the anonymity of faces  
 in houses about the stress of holding on  
 to clout to brandishing now every prostitute  
 knows how to simulate a prostitute make  
 itty Os in motel darkness nobody  
 speaks of the wildness of farmers someone  
 somewhere eating deep-fried songbird  
 and Jenny talking to the stuffed parrot  
 hanging in her cage winding the alarm  
 clock she keeps in a basket because she  
 does not own a watch and birds twitter  
 in the skull of her hedge because the children  
 and their little feet running over every blade  
 are terrifying though at least one of those  
 children feels suffocated by the sadism  
 of normalcy knocks on her door to be  
 near the beauty of foible to see her hands  
 hold chocolate bars like hymn books  
 to begin to imagine that the codifiers  
 will not win the compliment of haunting  
 by way of the violence of conclusion  
 his mother gasps when the football players  
 on the television fall down because she  
 hates when they fall down because she  
 has known great loss it does not make  
 sense to replicate it even playfully  
 she gasps as humans do when  
 witnessing everyday obliteration  
 or when hurtling their bones into one  
 another during sex or conflict swoon  
 or wince inescapable cry at the origin  
 of the storied world prior to money  
 but not desire and water and tongues  
 carrying through with it inescapable heart  
 and pubis of darkness *wherever you touch*  
*the story it is not nice* our journey began  
 in leisure and pleasure famine is a function

of fields that belong to someone the rape  
of states untruth that conceals the rape of  
individuals with telephones and the saddest  
Jell-O molds a ghost like Yeats for every  
decade to teach us to again walk through



## AQUARIA

It's a lot like consolation, the way snow slices the window in half, and beyond it the ocean wobbling as if to hypnotize us. We are miniature within the warm glass atrium of the aquarium, which has been placed sensibly or ironically against what it tries to portray. We wend our way around brackish bowls that invite us to touch creatures that breathe water. I say—*wouldn't it be awful to be one of the "Hands-on Area" starfish, to be a specimen relentlessly fondled?* You say they probably can't tell the difference between our hands and an ocean tide. *They're brains are probably teeny.* I think, *our brains our teeny.* I think, *maybe some people would be better off if they were regularly stroked.* I think of the time we were going to sleep under the stars, but I was afraid a bear would eat me, of how disappointed you were in my clichéd fear.

I don't comment on it, but you are wearing a transparent sweater. And your chest too is transparent, and your heart, and in that little beating carafe there is a man in a boat, and he's always looking up at us, but never speaks. He does not do anything as shameless as open his mouth, but he seems to be asking where his ocean is. I know he is thirsty because he is also transparent and his see-through organs are full of dust. You wind your way around the giant ocean tank trying to keep up with the green sea turtle's ancient eyes and crackled glass head, and the teeny man in his boat in your heart tips from side to side like a metronome. The turtle's mouth is much more avian than I expected, and its flipper-legs look like misshapen wings. The plaque tells us the turtle is over forty and eats lettuce and brussels sprouts. *She's like you, baby,* you say. When we get to the top of the tank and look down, she is blurry but we can still make out that her shell is heart-shaped and covered with horny plates.

When I return from going to the bathroom, I find you in the Northern Pacific Room beside the giant octopus crushed into the upper corner of the tank. It looks like red velvet cake, but for the bright white suction cups that invite and threaten. You are in the middle of the room, turning in circles. I ask you what you are doing and you say you're moving. You are drawing a small circle around yourself, again and again, until the air seems to thicken. I ask you to stop, and you start crying, but the little man in your heart is not. He does not forget how you felt when you first looked up and I was there, all freckle and giddy girl. He is waiting for you to walk out into the light again, to drink water. The aquarium seems suddenly too dark, too scripted. You say—*did you know octopuses are very intelligent? And strong?*

When we leave the aquarium, you say you have decided to become a sea voyager so a few days later a group of us go down to the dock to see you off. You are wearing a bright yellow shirt that I can't see through. The sun swarms our sea-salted hair, and you impress us by getting a seagull to land on your shoulder. Your cheeks are rosy and your eyes look like commentary on the limits of glass. Then you are off, drift into the blue distance. We all feel a little bereft. When I get back into my car and flex my foot, join other sitting people sliding over the gray interstate, I picture you being jostled in the sturdy U of a boat, how life-like it must feel. I picture you peering up at the endless uncommunicative stars, sensing sea life ribbonning beneath you, how nice it is that nobody puts a lid on it.

[RUIN IS A THING THAT HAPPENS IN THE PAST]

rain spreads like a negligee over everything—

My longing is a forest, and your voice is all the birds  
that live there, are hushed in the rain. Let me learn  
the candor of falling, the open-endedness of roofs,  
how to knot my fingers with earth and let go, how  
to put down the unending letter. When I look out into  
the porcelain night, see all the fissures widening—  
beauty shattering in deep magenta alleyways, I long  
for the moxy of the torrential. The old men in doorways  
speak in a language we cannot know  
of how to slice evenly down the belly of a fish.

The children keep darting out into the lightning,  
tempting the gods to tackle them. The rain is making  
a case—that baptism, that flush. That the stars will  
never belly up. That luster is, of course, an antidote  
to our eyes, and we are no more purgatorial than  
the pools underneath it all, catching the seemingly endless  
runoff, dirty as all get out. When it stops we go outside,  
electrified with silvery dampness, and stare down into  
the puddles. We see only the sanity of suggestion,  
the torn sleeve of time, evidence that we are not  
yet ghosts—all echo and ripple and swig.

THE TRILLING WIRE IN THE BONE

The bone broken for luck, scraped  
for meat, collected for construction,  
gnawed on. The temple of bones.

Bones that finger the shape & texture of other things—  
vellum, pudding, papyrus—only to find they, too, have bones:  
strawberry bones, mirror bones, horse bones, slot  
machine bones snapping back.

A deer-like shape turns its neck  
and you can hear the tiny crystals  
cracking like fish bones.

The big bones hold their breath.  
The tiny bones ballast the void.

Turned over, culled, buried, dug up, desiccating  
in the carbon-digging light. Ultraviolet rays.  
Bones dislocated. Bones hollowed. Bones stained.  
Bones archived, crushed to powder. The wind blooming  
bone red. The singing bone.

The translucent bone bodies of the cicadas abandoned.  
The alien borderlands: cartilage, tusks, horn, beak, hooves,  
their unique hip structure, *a bracelet of bright  
hair about the bone.*

Baby bones seafloor-spreading. *The wonderful fish-like  
economy of the lower back.* The soft seashell bones of  
the ear vibrating: malleus, incus, stapes. Bones sinking, sinking in.

Bones audible, frank, corrupted,  
bones splintering in the platform,  
in the crackle of the microphone:  
the lecture bone.

Bone orchard. Bone box. Bone cellar where  
beets gulp vinegar, where marrow pauses.

Bones in the bread, in the backyard, of the swing set.

My buttered, residential, bones,  
sugar bones, damn bones, hip bones, crevasse.

Bones boiled in broth.

Bones reconfigured into tools, stegosauruses, jewelry.  
Whale bones gathering the desert, *the prayer of*  
*the bone on the beach*. Signature of bones.

Joint pins and hip replacements gravely gripping while  
ligaments pull away from the scaffolding,  
blood caulking the body, opening the amphitheater socket.

Bones licked with live tissue. Bones connected,  
disconnected, wet. The moving, incoherent, bone.

Imposter bones. Electronic spine. Skull captions.

We were subjugated. We were alone.  
And the bones began to bargain with the body,  
vibrating first the heart.

## FALL OF FALLING

Everyone notices the fiery storm of clapping  
 before the fall, leaving in the branches like a light  
 left on long after wildfire has sucked the sockets  
 dry. The whole undivided sky like an eye upon  
 the set, where names are so new they jostle  
 inside of things, things ripe and mouth-watering.  
 What if we could watch it happen—the leaves  
 blush & curdle in the lawyered air, all sugar given  
 over to the blue reckoning of time? What if  
 we could see the earth twirling like an aged ice  
 angel on a shattering rink? Everyone notices  
 the girlish cheeks of autumn, the electricity of  
 severing. But what about the sheeps' blood  
 in the farmers' sinks? The flaunting choreography  
 of clouds crushed into rain? Pumpkin fibers  
 gunked between our fingers, seeds already salted  
 and swallowed? Wherever we carry the corn  
 it disappears. Whichever unmarked trail we take  
 the night follows us, and when we emerge again  
 onto an open road we are marked by the desire  
 to get out. Someone smokes in the middle of it all  
 and the thin strands of smolder drill open the sky.  
 The hawks kill the rabbits but do not eat them.  
 We are intoxicated and damp, but also lost. Count  
 the cotillions. Pile up the dresses that fell from  
 girls' shoulders dramatically, like fucking might  
 transform them. The boys' arms drop to their sides  
 like brackets. Let us admit the ache of harvesting—  
 the apples multiply before throbbing against  
 the cold earth. Let us watch them rot, backward  
 blossom into abstraction. Time tastes the zipper  
 as you pull it, kisses my neck with your mouth,  
 trails your tongue to the 6 o'clock hour of  
 my wet vulva. Time is a tease, a tramp, a bully.  
 Time with its mouth full of dirt, with its hands  
 up our skirts. There are not enough Eves—knees  
 ground into the grit of the evermore sophisticated  
 garden—to devour the evidence.

## THE CASE OF LYDIA

Lydia treasures looking  
out from within display  
cases, tenderly  
climbs inside,  
a fawn beside  
mannequins.

She leans against  
glass, tries  
to comprehend  
legs like lost  
roots in the water  
project.

Yellow  
descends  
its butterfaith,  
trammels the ellipse  
in the dark horse  
breath of planets.

Curtains across  
the pedestal dream  
and Lydia swims  
in the solitude  
of observation—  
divinely plotless  
diorama, medium-  
ship.

Eventually  
the glass takes her  
shape, begins  
to slip cellophane  
around her skin—  
Lydia vessel,  
Lydia capillary,  
Lydia Lydia,  
drained Lydia  
but for the real

Lydia who lies down  
inside this thin  
transparent version  
of herself, is unhinged  
by the vim pastoral

of her former body,  
can only look  
up through her domed  
skylight skull,  
envy the outline  
that cages her—

lowercase Lydia  
Lydia gathered  
and frozen in  
an aquarium of  
Lydia

## AGAINST PLUGGING AWAY

what about touching  
 your own arm as if it is  
 a felled thing, or a hermit  
    humming

-bird about to hatch

give me the corrupting  
 cadence of rain, pens  
 leaking through what  
 -ever they can get their tips on

the gripping redundancy of hands  
 smart little balloons bursting  
 thunderstorm thump of crabapples  
 labyrinth fish pulling oxygen into mazes

inoperative stare of stars—     vibrato of growing things, your ears even—

what if you could be convicted  
 of nothing but sinking  
 deeper into verbatim, plot  
 of land dented with (dare we dream it) sleep

over there the three-year old  
 picking cherry tomatoes,  
 the bright fission in his fists

                         surely superflux, surely a break  
                          from tiresome go-get-‘em undersongs

a levy of wind kisses your still forehead,  
 memories fermenting through screendoors

hushed patterns madden the rented  
 room where you breathe like a bee spiracled  
 to the outer world, not a car-bird caught in traffic

why not watch the horses  
 lug the fields into  
 penitentiary light, blink about,  
 let the sun fall into your  
 eyes like a back alley baptism

as waterfalls stroke  
 the air with wetness



## INCIDENTAL LOVE POEM

I step in the water sloughed off your body onto the bathroom floor. I sleep in your stains, wake in your border, eat your leftovers, sweep up your dead skin cells. Your sauces sit in my refrigerator like organs in their transparent, breakable containers. When you are here I hear you cough, stroke your skin as if to keep it taut. We swap colorless, odorless gases and saliva. Our eyes bob in our magnetic faces. When you are elsewhere, I curl like an old photograph trying to raise its dead. I swim in three lakes simultaneously. I part my hair down the middle of my head through the mirror where you untie your face, the sutures undetectable. I think of your body as a plank and a screen, of your soul as a cloud of grasshoppers. My tongue absorbs the salt in your skin, swallows oceans, the giant gyratory seagulls scanning my face, the sun holding my tender pink core together as you do. I finger through your pages, listen to the symbols grind their teeth. Your things congregate in small heaps. They take on significance, crystallize, and I am deep into the damp cavern of idolatry. I put on your shirt, spread peanut butter on toast. In my dreams I fondle your blue glacier, pull hummingbirds from your chest, feel quenched. I admire how your mouth never looks like a dam blasted with carp, how it evaporates in the skeletal light of the hallway. Our gravity is horizontal, palpable as heavy whipping cream. I decorate absence. I pull one of your hairs from my mouth.

## THE NESTED OBJECT

this is where shape incubates

the topiary brain—scissored  
by shadows: I have never touched  
the parrots at cage-distance mutely  
swooping in the air

since the elegant filament flickered out  
in the forgetting curve. The shell  
of things is sometimes enough  
to track the tiniest center of

the microscope nearing  
indifference: as surfaces give  
way, in, color disappears

division is the darling of this time—the apple  
garnet then white then brown then the near  
absence of atoms

these objects—inflatable pool, stuffed  
rabbit, cherry cordial, clarinet—can only be manipulated  
in dreams, the lobes lulled in lightmilk: staired  
beside the picture window. O, lettuce primped in  
plastic satellites,  
little house of lemon,  
red piano

cupped in the palm of the ocean, everything we do

not keep like heirlooms in the burgundy velvet of our organs—  
bell jar; spine lamp—krill staining the sea a similar red,  
even then a segmented translucence: our elegy  
cannot travel down the diatom breath-hall

*There was an old woman who swallowed a bird,  
She swallowed the bird to catch the spider,  
She swallowed the spider to catch the fly,  
I don't know why she swallowed the fly,  
Perhaps she'll sublimate, disperse with value,  
the ghost of wholeness absorbed by living  
cells like water sinking into any thing*

visualize the voiceless  
blood flow,  
bone pocket,

the nested object

there are no figurines that heap the form  
 of my lostyetenduring selves: enormous page, strange  
 pasture of minute humming, lifeboats dangling  
 above the terrific leaking, hallways of satchlings,  
 cartilage clinging to the flung diagram, big dipper  
 inside the bigger

we are swarming animals, leave  
 our exuvia as decoy, but our organs  
 remain canisters

in the sinew nest box:  
 hush-hush pit, cup of coffee, night  
 jars, battery, palmed heliotrope, land mines,  
 dolls insulating the bedroom, gears veiled  
 inside machinery, reusable space-  
 craft, time tangled around fingers

Ovipositors dip down into  
 the meat of fruit, deposit eggs  
 in the coddle-code of interiors

Sometimes I am conscious  
 of the sheath thickening

the exit ramp leading only elsewhere,  
 not out of the conjurer's cloth: dove  
 then no dove: little spatterings of sameness

I nest myself on this rocky ledge like a sea  
 -bird married to the sustenance of surfaces,  
 sun-bevy: held inside this ether, this ozone,  
 dark ovum of space. If you look  
 where I linger you will find the hearts I have  
 harbored, swarming like sardines: the waves  
 churning the bloodstream, an undercurrent  
 dragging them back into the depths

of the synaptic cleft

where dreams and whale bones  
 and all who I have loved: drift  
 inaudibly by in urns  
 like cars in a floating city where

a skyscraper trembles inside a skyscraper

## EMERGENCY BRAKE

The car will roll down the hill.  
Everything you own is disentangling.  
Everything falls to the floor around the corner  
into the wall. Through the window, a distortion of plains.

The car will roll down the hill.  
Everything you own will betray you, tend toward victim.  
It is best to unload yourself.  
It is best to unload as much as possible.  
The car is the first to go, a muffled negotiation.

Finally your skull, heavy thing.

## ORPHEUS XXX

In this version you don't look back  
 and does this mean that I escape into  
 the light, that we might frolic there?  
 or that I'm released into the whole-  
 hearted solitude of being?

You never look back, slip like wet clay,  
 your arm already around another life,  
 your Saab in her driveway, your head in the hollow  
 of her unerring clavicle, your body like any other point  
     along the dim horizon.

The light presses in all around me  
 like water. Breath by breath I turn to neon.  
 We, you & I, are some brilliant unbetrothed interstice:  
 sunlight & branches & a bird flitting here & then away.  
 We are the most relevant unreality, the most distant  
 truth, the glass door of some hell wildly revolving.

I'm not sure exactly what I mean  
 but I long & long & am lost in the phantom limbs of seeming.

Outside of simple demise we are still susceptible.  
 Beyond one brink we enter another, the memory  
 of the last still swallowing our feet like tar.

We attend, now, to our separate lives as if to vines  
 of tomatoes, the fruit flushed to *its* brink  
 of bursting. Our gardener wrists are delicate  
     and ruthless.

Light pours almost through me and I look  
 like a corpse shuffling among the greenery, snipping.  
 I see our reflections pooled in the still pond  
 of the ceramic birdbath.

Looking back is as likely as going forward,  
 but you never look back. Outcome is inevitable.  
 Either side of this fence could be myth. I am drowning  
 in freedom, my augury of birds scattered  
 as though by gunshot.

We are both living in houses built by others,  
 and the windows are blinded by their own formality,  
 the furniture already figments, the fire escape gone,  
 just gone.

# CONTOUR FIGURE ON A CONTOUR FIGURE ON A ROCK

the way the elbow leans on the knee — it could be coming from anywhere, this body or that — it is only when we trace backward to the conjunctions — wrist joint *and* ulna, *if* clavicle, *if* sacrum, coccyx *or* tailbone — that we realize we are looking at one body, presently wrapped in its own evocative pause — the closer I get the less definitive you become — you are a model leaking out of a model, an archetype dunking donuts in your mirror image.

thin red and blue outlines jangle about the body like eighties bangle bracelets, vie for your contour — that final clause that collects you up and says — *here* — to the waitress, lover, interviewer, et cetera with eyes — so who shall win — the blood red rendition or the less permeable blue of you? — which too — cobalt, glum — is its own kind of blood, uninvestigated by anything — swings, stethoscopes, ATMs — outside the body — swirling secretive inside — yet thumbtacked to injury: *anyone feeling blue today?*

your hair is equivocal, seems clamped on, the death clutch of a parasite — like dried icing or lava — we keep backing up — you sit on any rock — your eyes, wet chestnuts in a puddle of pixels — the blur of double-dutch dead-center — stare into the massive arbiter of all of this — space — the mouth cuffs itself like an activist to your image — such dedication to the thin borders that rope us off from everything else — each of us an expensive piece of art — the way your hand is cocked on the jaw, sitting like a dead crab on sand, makes us keep our distance — which means you become clearer by default — but one might find this very suspicious — superficialities — the crab, the hand *playing* dead.

## SUNDRESS

The young girl felt like a swing attached to tiny straps that u-turned over her shoulders. She didn't have a waist, but she knew she had the makings of one, her hipbones small omens. Grape was her favorite Fla-vor-ice, and when she pressed the jagged plastic edge against her lip it dripped across her chin and into the violets on her dress, staining the fabric like a bruise. When she smiled her teeth were a calendar of plums, incomprehensible. Everyday, the young girl looked up into the pornography of clouds and wished to be a new girl. She didn't know why the neighborhood boys leered at her, but she had a hunch that it had to do with the future. She looked away from the overture of eyes, practiced being the girl she would like to be, dragged the translucent flowers and gauzy white cloth with her, through the grass, in pursuit of crickets, her clavicle a compass. Her hair was a tangle of insurrection; her hands unfolded in front of her like they were each their own animal. There was her and the dress that held her, her and the dress that hid her. There was the wide world and this pretty semi-transparent cotton, among other things, between her nerves and the gnarly nest of growth. The hem divided her at the knees, bobbed in and out as if sewing her to sunlight, the whole yard fastened with lemon thread.

## PET

The room begs to be further inhabited, to have a sun moving in its plaster gut. At moments a decorative urge, the parrot bright and entertaining. At others—a death cry, everything so still and lasting as sandpaper, burning through to your bones with that stillness, where even you are armature, near-couch. You would not be alone. Your love would transfer directly through your hands. Someone pets the linoleum, then you. You pet your lover's head, smooth "I love you" into your child's hair like amniotic fluid, like cellophane around a dome of chopped carrots.

The Maine Coon sits on top of your refrigerator. You are fond of the unusual form following you as if it was your motor. As if an inexact circle was the shape of commitment. A shape you tend. Small box, cylinder, beak of noise, trace of liquid. How it curls in your lap, is impatient in your lap, slithers around your neck, licks your face, tracks up and down your arm, fidgets in your cupped palms, wants in. Even as its eyes swivel, cut through with an alarming precision. Even as we move, like them, constantly. We are hemmed in. The Dalmatian yanks on the leash, cuts off his own airway. Invisible in the pitch-black apartment, they still see, see nothing. A car drives by, headlights flooding their eyes, saucers filled before falling into silence.

Only the fish remain at a distance, flash like memory through the tank. The basking light burns all night, as in a driveway of twenty years ago, illuminated nets echoing our hooks, mayflies amassed at the surface. A tan Chihuahua with three legs hops up the stairs. A python presses like SPAM against the glass. No one knows why the dove started to pull its feathers out, reveal its pocked skin. The frog doesn't hop. Stuttered gerbil. Shape is no promise. Our hands twist, more or less away. We live in a petting zoo. Touch everything you can get your mind on. Feel for the goat. Don't be stopped by his hyphenated eyes. Don't just touch. Trail that touch, pet—slowly, slowly. He, too, is fascinated with disparity and freedom, rolls a green ball black back and forth in the grass with his nose. Can you hear the whimpering through the packed dirt, through your bent wrists, petting? You pet the carpet where you once slept, and it curls at the edges.



IS THERE ANYTHING LEFT IN THE LEAVES TO SPEAK OF

Trees hymn the architecture  
with slight movements.

Over there students with the heft of books  
tugging them toward the earth.

A quiet wind whips,  
and lone-together trees plug into other-than,  
weightless coins dropped, hit&run  
snip of autobiography.

We are as dunked under splat, near-wrecked  
as nature, but don't rush to grab up these loose  
apostrophes, though in each leaf is the pattern  
we seek in sentences, the cliffhanger writ out—  
that we do live varicose, falling, golden.



We blow machinal, or pull tines through tainted  
lawns, out nature from nature, though soon the scene  
will be burnt shut with frost, burst open as blank  
documents, white with gorgeous interference,  
all our effort toward the pretty punched out.



Electricity flits amid the branches, and we are quiet  
startled onlookers, though horsepower is also in us,  
breaks out as muscular hallelujahs, gasps, applause.

This is when the birds lift up in unison like a plume  
of smoke, and the colors of summer drain from the meadow  
behind the factory which knows no seasons.

You read the landscape's lesson for the umpteenth time:  
letting go is natural and inescapable.

Everything has a talent for leaving except you, who mourns  
how the light slides out of the window, how the birds take  
their songs with them. You know they will return,  
but the knowing never turns into trust.

Our greenhouses glow as if they'll survive our hunger.



Breathing's such a battle when air is a treacle  
of *was*, goulash of concrete and bookish  
things. Foliage falls through, and before we know it,  
we are beholden, combination-locked.

Of course, nobody knows the numbers  
and it would take a lifetime to turn  
out the answer, or turn over the equation in which a duplicate  
of the answer is locked.



Dear Fall,

At least *carte blanche* the buddy next to me, who has spent all day igniting  
your hectic math.

For me, I only ask that my face, like the expression of trees, is blown apart  
a bit by the wind.

## THE LEAVING

pumpkins hushful and heavy in fields swell through vines  
that tunnel & fidget underground and leaves fall  
like table skirts, stillness scattered all at once from its frame

the chain-link fence, the spokes of bicycles, the river's ceiling,  
glasphalt—all doused in autumn's rum: crimson, chartreuse, russet

to be under the right tree at the right time, when a little wind comes  
crackling—as if that simple gesture might blur my life back

once I helped my brothers pile leaves on top of me as I lay  
on my back, arms raking wildly at the air and ground, my eyes tightly closed  
until the commotion ceased and I was entirely under, the smell of decay and dirt  
pouring through my body. I opened my eyes and saw hundreds of beams  
of light loosened in the leaves around me, the world beyond my masked breath  
glistening, and I felt for the first time the joy of being buried,  
of disappearance

now, I drive I-81 South, alone—Mack trucks, median strips,  
my mind loud as locusts, thoughts of war, of work, of therapy, which rest stop,  
which end, a loved one with brain cancer. The windows are cracked  
and the wind hisses, amplifies the smell of upholstery

if, only for an instant, I could be consumed by the dropping trinkets of trees,  
embrace erasure, but the foliage flickers by, the trees bright & translucent as damselfly wings,  
the whole spectrum strung like fish from a wire

## AFTERNOON ETHER

Mold spores land on wet surfaces,  
and for three hours I remove this evidence,

disinfect the bathroom with chemical pine,  
wipe away our wandering animal hair.

On the shelf, I dust the clotted memory of mollusks,  
press the lightning whelk shell to my cheek and it threads

through me like a pozidriv-head screw made of nothing:  
and saltwater swells in around my organs,

fills up my body and spills out into the whole of  
Eau Claire, river spent on river, swallows dipping

down, just above the new aquarium of the room,  
the house buckling, papers and furniture turned

planetary, mute. I am split, underwater, wearing  
a bracelet of fish bones, wet sand filling up my ankles.

Through the kitchen window I see an ATM  
floating by, the ether locked inside it, wet.

Somehow, through the instantaneous, beyond the now  
folded garage door, I hear a car pull into the ocean,

and my heart heaves itself back to shore, crowns,  
retracts, and crowns again, splitting the linoleum.

Outside, the engine is cut, the minnows  
are gone, and the sun is the oligarchy that perforates.

I feel my body in the shape of a shell,  
hot metal cooling under my hood,

my fingerprints a whorl of branches, the bathtub blank.

BINDWEED // REMEMBERING

Necklace bindweed which glitters and cools.  
 Necklace bindweed which hoists my joints through  
 my ribs, felons the simple custody of our remembering.

How will I this hiatus? How will I this back which I cannot  
 see without mirrors? How will you whisper when the wind  
       has divorced itself from bluebirds?

Remember my fishnets, my snapdragons, my light-  
 bulb hands, cable of hair that copses the living  
 room. Now tomato atoms cluster in the backyard, shiver  
       in the remorseless nuptial of where else. Children  
 of the shorn. Vaulted voices. Small unfolding cabinets.

Which erupt. Which thicken. Which snag.



Now remembering bulbs our nuptial hands;  
 wind glitters our joints—bindweed, bindweed

which fishnets tomatoes in light, snags

Bluebirds cluster in backyards, mirror atoms  
 whispering hiatus. How remorseless unfolding.  
 How divorced the snapdragons from voice.  
 Will I remember the children, the felons, my own  
 ribs hoisted into custody? Cable which I cannot  
 see, which cools through a small thicket of hair?

      Which room of where else?  
 Which room will you back into?

Cabinets of necklaces. Shiver of necklaces.  
 How, without, will I simplify this?  
 The shorn. The vaulted. I which when itself  
 wills from *my*—*our*, which in the copse  
 has erupted—

      my my my that the living



Tomatoes without hands  
 will the children to remember  
 necklaces of snapdragons, necklaces of voice

that bluebirds weed  
and bind to light. Small vaulted ribs.  
Simple joints. How I cannot shiver.

We wind their custody through the copse,  
whisper our unfolding.

Rooms erupt into living hiatus.

If we cluster the nuptial in the backyard,  
will a felony of atoms glitter past our remembering?

Bindweed the bulbs that otherwise divorce?

My fishnets cool back into me. Now into you.  
Will you hoist me, our cabinets of shorn hair?

How else will we cable the room  
which cools? Which itself thickens with remorse?  
How I lessen. When and where and which snag. See—

## INTERSTICE

A night passes inside small car doors, their empty handles confronting our hands. The precincts of everything evaporate. The canvas of the body unstretched & trudging backward through the visible corridors of the cornea, into a former, less rented foyer of yourself, where you can't even remember the body, let alone its religions, but what remains are these ethereal steps of spine, with which we climb into each other, into our disappearance, our shudder, our slight song. A seed exploding in blackless dark. We wake with a dusting of sugar around the mouths of our pores, a whisper about the body.

## SLOW SAUNTER OF WITHER

A cow's ears can turn in any direction, and the field  
is full of those flickering radar, small curtains

of flesh. We are an acoustic location, a passing thing.  
Our car gulps in the grass air, is pulled by an under-

current. Dependence like a taste, the dark drawbridge  
of night folding form down into nestle, wind rattling

the hollow half-note of mailboxes. The chest  
floor opens upon the earth, slow saunter of wither

and hook bone, verb between *sun* and *graze*, *sun* and  
*subsequently*. No moo. No matter. Who or what was

the first to look toward the teat of another animal and feel  
thirsty? Did they also feel suspended? Sleepy? Cosseted?

Guilt or indignity for the theft? I am, even now, startled  
by their calmness, heart girth purring like a small fan.

Milk teetering in warm pockets, and us nearby—  
continuous intravenous drip. Dream of clotted cream,

sinewy lullaby. Water to wine—that's showmanship. Water  
to milk—that's love and peril. A marriage that should raise

a cathedral up around their pin bones, sacred the space  
so to take is to need: dire roast. But instead we

forklift the living into the living, harvest what we can.  
News reports recall meat is piling up in school districts.

Freezers. Hangs from our bodies. When the cows lie down  
in unison, we better run for cover. I try, but my feet are full

of meat, heavy against the moving vehicle on the moving earth,  
milky clouds amassing above us like a scavenging.



## ARCHAEA

flushed quietly out, so quietly

cut at the ankles, tethered to a tree  
in the dark specimen jar, carried

off, eaten glistening cherry,

correspondent, spoon tuna out of  
aluminum, moist flakes pull off in  
one piece like a chemise, the zebra's  
cutis the horse swarmed the kangaroo  
tail all that remains of the kangaroo

after a billion years will suddenly collapse

into no kangaroo but the specimen,

the jar filling with dust and brine,

we are the bright luminous hydrogen  
clouds and prominences, the extremophile,  
gulping toxic skirts nerveless anything debris

blood platelets under the swarm

of ants, the aluminum cloud closing  
both its mouths, a tube jellyfish  
slipping like a spoon into a can

digestion a light show of the bottomless

## HULL

after *Egon Schiele*

my hand a small  
piracy on your chest.  
your arms splint  
of light & effluvia.  
how mounting  
seems an answer.  
trains have cut  
through forests  
of voice but here  
our pubis glints  
like chrysalis. we  
disappear in back  
-ground. swarm.  
cluster. I hazard  
the knots of you,  
cling to your contour—  
thin skin so as to  
gather. all the pink  
parts of us glow,  
plumb inward,  
like the postponed  
anchors of water  
hyacinths. nothing  
overt as bone, cells  
lurking. in what  
truth could we float?  
your shoulder is a cut  
of meat I would marry;  
I place my ear against  
your back, hear  
an inner form I can  
almost comprehend.  
bravely our masturbation  
unlocks the combination  
of diary hips, gestures  
toward a juncture  
that invents solitude.  
our rib cages keep  
pressing into each other,  
as if to nurse, to disperse,  
to come undone.

## HAWAII OF MOURNING

Imply the body to something beyond the body, from ground to floating, from the chemical swap of spit to thoughts wraithlike in their delicate coats. But enter the televisual, the virtual, the skin skinned, the sun neon in this cave. If only the fleeting, the pop-up, the chatting would drop like concrete into our cabinets of tissue. If only the copies stopped reproducing, and we pick ourselves up from the plush carpeting, rewind our knees.

Light hums in the belly of the machines, myelin scarred and unable to pass messages through our bus stops' toxic skirts, end stops, camouflage. 9/11 tendered, carceral, a skin with pores so deep they fit planes through and come crashing down, backbone through facades, surfaces on the verge, surfaces that distend like over-watered lawns. Gloss the seemingly spontaneous event.

The children freeze at their darling desks. We try to pry their fingers open, but the Play-doh in their palms warms. Click on Suicide Girls to see salty skin spread boldly over its scaffolding, stick to its origin like spilled glue. Audiences grope 9/11 like this: dislocated unease, hawaii of mourning. A lap bar falls across the gut. Intestines wind like a rope into a basement. Close the door.

Pull back the skin to prove I am full of the working wet equipment of space. Chemical embrace, nitty-gritty. Blow-up dolls dreaming of a blood theater. Each bomb an albatross necklace, each cluster a communication. Put this pinecone in your pocket. This is a challenge. The seams seem into you.

## ISCHEMIC CASCADE

don't plan anymore. how wholly the city floods  
with electricity. yet the body is most alive when un-  
plugged, voltage centered in meat. who may  
well enter. we enter. we go into the emergency  
room, babies blooming in the linoleum vault.  
the stain relocates: body—cloth—brain—brain  
—brain. limbs are rulers of memory, the conservatory  
of self closed with arctic blueing.  $\frac{1}{3}$  of all heart attacks  
are silent as snow against grass, the intricacy at once erased.  
the flow stilled in the stem like wine. somewhere beyond  
the measurements the bridge sways. the attendees panic  
in their tending. the universe originates inside something  
small, but not me. the tools and bulbs purse. you must be  
attentive: my hand has touched everything.

## KNEE-DEEP

The body – god box – holds  
the stuffing, blunt-winded plot,  
until it doesn't

tissue of tiny details  
soaking up gestures of wedding  
parties, neurons, steering wheel,  
sugar bowl, the solarium

the nectar ebbs from the design

an autopsy, the openings filled with liquids,  
already locked-out of the house, embarrassed

The river bank has been dented—  
material ghost, the knees lock-kneed, knee-deep

What is left is fact and its antihistamine

Carry it to the river and drop it in. Watch it give in  
like a vocabulary greased, the fish unlocked by their own

removable beauty

Echo the ocean of you when you (carrying the description)  
are gone. So swam the surplus, blindingly bright, away

## HONEY ME, HONEY HUNTING

## I. Head

in the inner hive, total darkness

seven thousand hexagonal facets  
affixed to its be/e-face, the mosaic blooming

while ours singulars in a locket of bone,  
the neck the root of possibilitybut

riven with sight: dichard mirror,

committed buckets—and this, this  
barrels around at a knock; even

invisibility is registered, and I  
look through the peephole with  
thrill and horror, though mostly

with those buckets again, hungry  
for light, for your body against

the night lulling a bell in the blackness,  
proving it's not whole, but you are not

there, just my head in its leaning-tarp.

## II. Thorax

if only we could walk, fly, & sting  
without our pitch-dark firebrains,

but traces of loving gum  
in the pollen-basket of our optic nerve,  
our ordinary nerve, as if useful,

honeyready, I walk repeatedly

toward the door that neither nor,  
is not a gift or message. We met

in the sun which I suspect

inspires that mid-flight mating,  
uncalculates the cunning rooms.

I want to believe in this bigger picture  
you whisper into the receiver, this fate

you formula over my lips, but

drones die in the act of mating  
and women have been paid to hold  
horse penises in their mouths.

### III. Abdomen

near the nerve ganglia: the honey  
stomach, near the aorta: wing muscles;

bar here, where our eyes, nose & ears congregate  
around the brain, the heart measurable

expanses away, desert of blood buried  
beneath the glistening amber of our s/k/in;

hark the right atrium collects the poor—  
gazebo of stingless bees, debeaked birds,  
ceilingless floors, mouthless humans.

“Honey me a song, an avocado, a walk,”  
I say to the diaphanous fossils, the detached

words like wings, literal wings, falling  
flakes from that nowhere place of  
concoction inthesky

I stick my tongue in—the future  
tastes like the motion of

oranges tossed on the bed  
around me to suggest I am

edible, pulped, segmented inside—  
in the hide, hidden, the honey den

—and before the form is truly,  
my heart more than a swarm of cells

the hands hover, dip down, hunt  
for the dream of autotomy,  
that toxins & matter drift

## MATTER-OF-FACT

Umbrellas open inside the body—can you hear the sad music from hand-painted furniture, the clamor of teeny apparatuses: tweezers, eyelash curler, razor, or further:

scalpel, staples, stitches—the whirl of shopping carts pushed through space into the echoing basement of the brain. One woman encourages another to *get in shape* as if there is

an answer to the body—rhombus? star? chandelier? What word of mouth, paraphrase of ligaments, leaves us half-whole, entirely hole? The only channel coming in

is a soiree of fragmentary debutantes, spread sheer across our skin like sweet&sour glaze—but in the dark of flood lights those beauties button up their monologues,

wish away their cut&pastiness, cry truckload after truckload into Iowa, an ever more distant self. What fête, what adieu is there in throwing one's body back into a black hole,

light eaten by absence, leaving nothing but the sputum of light? This disappearing act has gone too far—into our DNA, which will eventually grow hips, parentheses

that suggest the body irrelevant, and there is nothing left to do, but step out of the gauze, empty anesthesia into the streets, and watch the tarmac go numb—feel the skin

tingle under the fat sun? the untidy rain? We don't melt—and this is how we learn to love our other -worldly warehouses, our flesh so near

it is the only clarity.



## VANISHING TENSE

Fruits are tweaked to tang  
 like other fruits—tangelo, grapple, jostaberry,  
 plumcot—hybrid rapture at our fingertips—  
 Vegetables plumped colossal  
 while pixels multiply, scurry like silverfish,  
 then glaze. Kiosks migrate inward.  
 Fumes douse the air. One thesis brandishes cutlery,  
 another cuts. Wires dip down the throat, hood  
 the plosives as connective tissue grows  
 on the sides of buildings.

Here, organs seem residual, romantic even.

Light is the lake we remember through,  
 jogging our memory with each undulation, our teeth conical  
 and interlocking, our backs momentarily  
 dorsal, no bones, small inconspicuous openings,  
 the dangers glittering & spinal as fluorescent bulbs,  
 the county line drawn over the sutures of our skulls.

A dolphin's grayish back blends with the dark of depth,  
 its whitening belly with the bright surface of the sun-laced sea  
 while we stand in the foyer, eyes wet, waiting to be let in

where genetics & scanners & peroxide have not yet burned  
 through our bodies, made them transparent as surgical gloves,  
 the heart beating in its gelatinous vanishing tense, the chambered  
 nautilus knowingly curled in on its prehistoric cache, light leaking  
 into its eyes, our arms full of measured solids.

In the tampering we are saved, sliced off, repeated,  
 the images & information of our images & information dropped  
 like dollops of cream into our common, cyclopic sense,  
 our faces paper panels spreading like lily pads across surface.

We sit at the table dumbfounded by the intimacy we feel  
 with meat, how long we stay with the gristle on our plates.

## THE LAWN AGLOW

Finally the sun has come out again.  
The slatted roofs are silently warming,  
small mossy things tingling in the pith.

Poppy after orange poppy after poppy  
the earth laces its lack of ambition into  
the air as if to bind it. The cat cannot be

convinced out of the bed of tall allium.  
Who can blame it for bathing in its body's  
island of warmth? What amniotomy

of light. Cohesion ruptured. Shade & glare  
absorbing walls and birds then slipping away.  
Oubliette where everything emerges. Porches

of fragment & leeway. The warm hose snakes  
around the foundation, drips tepid metallic-tasting  
water into the soil that hugs the house in place

like a strange uncle. Get up thermal thing.  
Follow the flickering where ants lick  
the pink pink lids of peonies.

## TOUCH ME ALSO, GODDESS OF INEVITABILITY

Or watch how long I sit in the bathtub waiting to ripen,  
transfigure, transform into anything else really, something slippery and barely geometric.  
Let me be an unbeautiful beast with a heavy heart and eyes as wide as the night.

Let me have no taste for song or salt, no cause, no boat in my brain I keep  
rowing even though it just knocks against the dock.

The filmy indifferent water looks like amnios, no? It seeps into my body until the skin is  
waterlogged, buckling. How long before this version gives way, dissolves completely?

I have no talent for fortune, cannot read the baby spiders traversing the droplets on the  
fogged window behind the shampoo. I just can't stop seeing how small they are, imagining  
the nearly nonexistent spool of their breathing.

But you, Ananke, you know when to paint whiskey onto the barn and let the horses lick,  
when to let scatter a scene with a whipping boy, a dazzler, an outlaw, when to let go of  
a girl who cannot caramelize a kiss, when to consent to murder or an eternity of birds,  
whether the bullet grazes or sinks. You know when to let the landscape burn away and when  
combustion belongs to a single soul about to board a bus in Indiana.

I have tried to know these things, to go with my gut, to be an arrow that organizes what it  
passes through, but I always end up with sadness upon me like a lace of pesticide laid over a  
field of fruit.

Still, I feel another me inside of me struggling for a way out from under the endless  
compulsory ruin. Or maybe the tiny spiders trapped in the catastrophe of my waiting are  
already me on their multiplied way elsewhere, to a world of diaphanous invention and quiet  
design.

Ananke, you know when to whisper into the animals' ears: *go ahead, eat them. They're yours.*

Is it wrong for me to want to be near that? To be touched by such force, such certainty? To  
not have to single out a life. There's not a hesitation in your body. You are all wind and next-  
door-neighbor-knocking. I see how you just get on with it, interrupt a chest with a sword,  
arrhythmia, love. You know how to bring a city to its knees, how to discombobulate bodies  
with rubble and smoke, how to wait well beyond when the sirens stop and breath sinks into  
the soil and there are no questions left upon the cold earth.

I am lonely. My body is lonely. I sit outside and let the wind tangle my hair. I understand  
that this is nothing like a relationship. I understand that relationships take time and hack it  
into bits. I understand that while we're not looking time slithers back together, wins.

I understand that caring about relationships is still imperative. I understand my alternatives  
are limited: money, success, things on their own, collecting snow globes, darkness, having  
fuller lips, youth, money, death, death's big triumph, other endings, a lawn, escape.

Touch me, dear goddess of inevitability, with your giant mouth. Let me inside of that mouth where it's warm with ferment and finishing.

Tell me the next person to come upon this apartment will find the bathwater beautiful and the glorious cables of cobwebs strung across the air like a note will be read. Tell me there will be translators for this sort of thing.

## FATAL LIGHT AWARENESS PROGRAM

Even the birds cannot avoid such reflection,  
the perils of daylight brushed so bluntly over things—

tiny bones  
big world

the infrastructure as much box  
as highway, the guardrails crumpled  
the bodies up against,  
intimately dying

asphalt, vein, distance arched  
always under us

a side mirror lost in the brush

At night the artificial lights draw  
the birds, by day  
the inweave of trees, cumulus,  
all that is bluish & giving  
way

O that the glass might open  
up, give us room,  
that we could marry the mirage, stay whole  
as seeds swallowed

O spectroscopist—  
if only our radius, our hipbone would not lead us there

## INCOMMENSURABLE

The empty silo is begging for light. The mint is gone, though the trellises and the shop of replicas remain. Instead there are orange berries bursting like lottery numbers, shelves that lead tchotchke, whatnot, into sediment.



Polygons grow old in the shadows, grow tentacles in the margin, begin to think of shape as something more complex than itself, something more like a giant squid washed up on shore, the pressure of matter replaced with the pressure of light. The loss of medium too much to bear.



Pet the polygon. Toss back the squid! Leave the ocean on because it is the only television for me, and you are the medium, the undercurrent, the single frequency I understand: blue wash, blinding.

# MY TONGUE FEELS LIKE A WILD ANIMAL

I sit upright and listen to a lecture  
 about body-soul dualism, God and Darwin  
 and Descartes mentioned so many times  
 it seems a nursery rhyme; meanwhile a sea  
 forms in the groove of my tongue,  
 nearly overflows my small ununlockable mouth  
 and my tongue twitches as if coming alive,  
 rolls its thick pink body against the felt  
 ceiling of its cage, and then splits my face to feed—  
 I am the watering hole, the geyser, the gulf  
 I cannot return to. My eyes drop wet ropes  
 down the shaft between us.

It lifts its head and I can see a dark underbelly,  
 swollen purple knots nearly bursting loose.

Which end is its origin? Where cherry lifts up into  
 the air like a sensor or where it slips like a blind  
 snake down the hatch of my throat? I can barely  
 get a glimpse of it but I sense the quilt stillness  
 of starfish prowling about my mouth— tip, blade,  
 dorsum, root, body.

Though leashed it seems to lead, my body  
 now nothing but secretion, merely the place  
 where the lingual lives. It's an in-house baptism.  
 How else to reckon all the fleshy fruit everywhere  
 bursting from zilch, the dumb universe?

What is scattered might be gathered in the catch  
 and release of air, in the patient explosive syllable  
 repeated—ah ah ah ah-ha. So I am its shepherd,  
 though it is no sheep.



Writhe and pant through the aquamarine night.

What can I say? It wants what it wants,  
 ravenous bundle of cables—licorice, cream,  
 bubble gum, the pinkest dampest parts of others,  
 brine of the viscera. Let us in.

It sees the world as supine test strip, slip and slide  
 of meaning and shock. Knock knock on the nodes of  
 Ranvier. Give me the hot moist insides of things

or give me death. Give me songs that seed ellipses,  
 that run our tongues over gravel. It moves  
 like the magnetic eye of a panther, licks along  
 the creases of the world. It's true: *I'm* hungry for  
 dumplings, juice, inner ears, remedy, umami, nipples,  
 apples, psalm. I try to stay calm, roll down a window,  
 but the world wafts in and my tongue goes after it—  
 licking legs and knives and lollipops. I am breathless,  
 my hair sweat-soaked and tangled. I could bite  
 my tongue, but it's got nerve, thrashes, arches its spine,  
 breaks free.

It cannot be trusted. It says one thing and I mean  
 another. Besides, it's tied to splatterings of sense,  
 a nozzle disappearing into a car, and the car sputtering  
 into a crowded town—Welcome  
 to the Tower of Babble.

When I'm not listening, it floats a valentine  
 to other tongues, and the next thing I know I'm mouth  
 to mouth, resuscitated.

Operatic going-to-town. Smooth slathering.  
 I want to say something to let you know I am  
 here, but my tongue is trying to tie itself to yours  
 so as to not drift off. Or is it trying to devour yours?  
 It's a tongue-eat-tongue world. Even now  
 some tongue turns a bit of cow tongue over  
 in its mind. Even now someone is silenced,  
 someone glossed.

My tongue gazes into your tongue's face as  
 if staring into its own for the first time.  
 But kissing can only carry on for so long.  
 Eventually it backs down, realizes it can't  
 untether itself from me.

But sometimes it curls up and sleeps like a baby  
 in my maw—desert fox; giant squid; parrot; urchin.  
 Something is on the tip, but it's not what you think.  
 Mostly, kittens mew and lick each other's ears, and I fall  
 into the gaping muteness of flowers. The quiet sun  
 covers us, low lilt of a lullaby in the distance—



## THE ENGINE

*Elegy for a Bus Driver*

The door opens. The door closes. The sun somewhat perforates our profiles. Whoosh that we were a collective. You keep your eye on the road, let the rearview mirror transcribe your body as backlog. I look at him. He looks at her. She looks at her. They look at me. But you, you are left out of this loosening and thickening, seatbelt keeping your chest intact, gauzing against shoulder and into bus. My skirt spills, leaves me legless; my hands like fruit in my lap. Always outside floods us. You take our coins, drive us across the river. We are distributed and/or alone. You are yet again pale with restraint, your heart and the engine twins vying for which will consume the other first. When you bend the body wherein my body lurches I sway like a reed in a storm, know that we are caskets-in-waiting. Now is the time for someone to say they want off.

## ARDENTIA VERBA

the ocean laps toward shore, but land puts nearly its whole  
body underwater as if to live there, where touch decides

we know nothing

each medusa an organ disguised as debris  
the autocracy of the photon disperses, the diluted

light of the moon returns to the surface, gently tosses  
tulle over a language of living tissue, the distinction

between animal and location all but illegible, organized sea  
water amasses at the edge of breath to feed—mass

ascension—radiant inkling of asterisms—in hydrostatic  
spirals deep below where the ocean hears the heart

of the earth churning, urchins spill their sperm & eggs  
while jellyfish light up the sensory bath—instruments

in the submersible bleached blue—mate & prey in sheer  
incandescence, luminosity a lure, lines of stinging cells

billowing

THE FURTHER WE WADE OUT

*You have come to the shore [and] there are no instructions.*

—Denise Levertov

Look here where we limn the shore by the thousands,  
laze away the day under an intercom of sun, let the collapse

of water lull us to sleep, and you easily see wealth and languor,  
that we are wildly pleasure-seeking, honey bees lapping

at a vast trough of nectar, cans of coke glinting like altarpieces  
in the sand; But look closer and see this: that we are together

the children of spheres, lying out under a tangle of clouds  
with the persistent hope that the dear distant scattering orange

animal will touch us with its warm tongue like a mother  
cleaning her offspring after birth. Each time it disappears

into the sheet music of movement, we stare like kids  
who have lost their bright yellow ball in the brush, wait

for the world to push it back into our palms, golden layer  
cake our everyday. And it does, roll out each time like a new idea,

a yolk. The motes around the sandcastles slowly swallow  
the castles down, leave only the glistening subdivisions of light.

The sand affectionately covers us with convection, glitters  
across joints. We wade out into circularity, our knees going under,

our mouths O-ed in eager anticipation for the next wave to fold  
us into the diameter of an undivided world. Our earthen eyes

reflect the sun's imperative—pour out another ocean. We are  
momentarily breathless, rich green seaweed ringing around our bodies—

dispatches from the deep bell of beneath—sea swell like heart swell.  
The further we wade out, the less distinct we become, seeds scattering,

making the horizon less linear. Seagulls scavenge, leave the carcasses of  
shellfish strung like syllables on the beach. And we emerge, our lips

salted, the hair on our bodies beaded like the luminous strands of  
a sonogram, speechless but aglow.



## SUNSPOTS

red spills from my nose, from small  
 linear openings, gash, shredded cuticles, vagina,  
 spreads out over my eye—a quiet dangerous lace—  
 claiming the vitreous pasture of assumption,  
 marking the ever-edits of my bulk. Nests of pink  
 and plum form near the surface. A net emanates  
 from the body, almost divulges the tenor of loss.

to suggest no architecture can jell without light;  
 blood swims inside, but bleeds outward toward  
 the sun's ongoing magnetic moment, seems  
 to want out of here like a teenager on a spree  
 toward contamination.

sometimes I even taste it in my mouth

am reminded that I am a puncture of fractions  
 that accrete toward a whole, that gather around  
 openings like bright lipstick. Elsewhere black holes  
 assemble away. I watch the liquid rise its diatribe  
 into shape, then exceed and trickle—immigrant  
 hieroglyphics of swarm. The blood jostles  
 inside its own cell.

love at first wrapping, liquescent kaboom

so that the girl who grips her own wrists like celery,  
 cuts through the uncanny seamless, is asking to undergo  
 further faster amendments, to evaporate, even incompletely,  
 into the air we breathe, to make a sound by letting  
 out the living from the living

zombie particles aloft

## CONSANGUINEAN

countless things float in a séance of water,  
     irrigate cohesion  
         (though each, also, a lesion  
 in the ether of sheen)

                                    the water not yet touched  
     or named, I trust  
 its solvency/heat index/meaning even if

    it remains opaque/dense/saline,  
 not anything downright as a reflecting pool, a birdbath, but  
 some sort of quantum entanglement between you and me

        flux folded in  
         unfolds  
 fragility  
     scaffolding & light (lux that crams the eyes,  
 the unembroidered properties)—deep sea life, the bells of jet propulsion  
                             stinging

water (death by water)

                    everything was haunted  
  
 (pools, lakes)/diagrams of the errant organ  
                     the support system and mutiny of everyday objects  
 (their electron clout) & the sometimes  
     terror of the inanimate—diorama, miniatures, blind trinket, the souvenir floating  
                             off

the shelf, all whatnot withstanding beyond our lives, perhaps, terrifyingly, forever  
     glass, relationships  
 lost in language  
 cruelty (our level of attendance—  
 kiosk or junkyard,  
     quarry or church): god & crowds & butter from one point source

                    slowly slowly the glaze  
 the blueing print dead center, forms flailing  
     sugar amassed  
     at the surface—haptic (pew) interference

    I swallowed some dated sun  
         rain through the hole in our Pantheon heads  
 I tapped the Lladró, stomped my hearts, collected shells how long  
     I cannot count  
 please, with whatever epoxy works, the mesh our only body

## FOUR

it wasn't to be foreseen  
this chance assembly—  
our four hands some  
hindu god over the raw  
fish so that I think—what if  
I put my hand inside  
your hand, not the titillate-  
courtesy of holding, but  
hand-in-hand, my hand  
swallowed by yours, your  
hands filled with antecedent—  
matryoshka hands; what you  
touch I touch  
you reach across the table  
to touch the ghosts of  
my former hands and I feel  
anticipation burn in  
our bloody double tissue  
like the second coming  
of some other christ—  
tinderbox  
your desire twice over.  
and while we're fucking  
I imagine the whole structure  
collapsing down around us,  
everyone undone in the  
stream of headlights pouring  
from the river's edge.

## STORAGE

The baffled translation of souvenirs. The other lives we've shed like mayflies risen out of one kind of breathing into another, grade school exuvia, vehicular middle life—all trinket gowns thrown away, and this simply by being in time. River gallop, epochs, years, seasons, ice suddenly suffocating the macadam and then drifting. The curtains are tied back, but sway in the draft, faintly disintegrate. We keep our things in boxes, piles, bags. The basement is racked with our former selves. dawn. Before-dawn dawn. I am matroshkya, but cannot contain my inner dolls, only the traces of her in plastic storage bins. And with her and her, then and then—mixed tapes curled in on themselves like the secret of ammonite, knowing they are pre-post-matter. Spooling the silent z-spin of time. We amass these evermore wraithlike things because we think it is important to keep in mind the bodies we have carried, the hands we have held, actions vestibuled and written into cloth. We think we will go back, page through these tectonic shells—geography tests, action figures, letters that drowned us in inversion, bits of colored plastic. Flotsam that rises only in our hands, splayed out on the living room floor like fossils that cannot be reconfigured into a dinosaur, a dinogirl, a diagram of everything.

The ink fades in the dark like a live thing.

Sometimes I fantasize about such a whole spool, a string strung out of me like a spider's web since my birth, something that has tracked my every move, can show me at satellite-distance the shape I have made in the world with my movements. Maybe it looks like a constellation with a discernible outline—lotus, frying pan, mythic body, goat. Or maybe my wanderings are so small that they make only a small dark circle, like a pile of deep purple yarn. Placenta. Filigree stills me in its center of doubling back.



## CUL DE SAC SONNET

We drag the mattress into the night.  
Hour of duration and mulch. Stomata  
opening. Dandelions sift moonlight  
through yellow tendril-skirts, clavata

swelling the horizon. To remember  
the house, just feet away, is difficult.  
Electricity hollows the inside ember  
like quiet hammers of demolition, jolt

of magnetism. How it is a barb  
of emptiness that holds us down. Lust  
for mineral beds, thick debris, the arb-  
bitrary steaming fractures. We trust

the sudden animal arc of our hipbones,  
the androgyne bloom of subsoil moans.

LOVE LITIGATES LIKE THIS:

sugar sugar sugar go go  
go sheet sheet sheet

I dip my felt-tip face  
to your page and let all the ink in me run  
out, leave a dark & rebel stain.

The heart beats so bloodily,  
so why can't we feel the blood along the arteries,  
the perpetual massage of living?

We talk with the pulp of fruit  
in our mouths through the chain-linked  
fence of our faces, quaint the ceremony.

*Beauty persists*, you remind me,  
and the little moons in me chuckle,  
tug at the intricate rug of ocean that is  
your heart, immense serenity & torrent vast.

In my dreams my gypsy  
emotions are pumping gas, preparing  
to look for you, some deeper truth, away  
from this sexual grind of glimpses.

This morning I woke with your voice,  
but then, I opened my eyes & it drifted as if  
realities are only made of corneal playthings –  
Your voice is at least ten swallows  
emerging from a chimney.

I have never in all my poeticizing  
produced or erased a piano, and yet, when you  
say something, suddenly, tangibly, I can feel  
the piano press in all around me as if I were born  
in it all along. I move, and despite myself, a key twists  
out a sharp note, a sustained note –  
the crescendo comes.

At night when your fingers drum on your chest  
in a small incision of light, you remind me  
of my own imminence.

My dependency clinks & chatters its teeth. Can you hear  
its minute vocabulary of *come*? This is just to say:  
I pledge allegiance to your maverick canon,

your anthro-apology, your peculiar thirst.

It's a rather small church—  
just the revered-one and the reverer.

## [SALVAGED IN ASUNDER]

were it not for the shifting  
 blues in lakes   dark sky scalloped  
 by bats   glint of glass insulators  
 available sugar   nerve endings  
 mossed inside skulls  
 were it not for the numbers  
 we memorized and swapped  
 the necklaced numbers tugging  
 of streams   translucent hair  
 suspended

were it not for the mending  
 of roots   airbags   fuss   couriers  
 blinking   gust   layers of gauze  
 beauty held bubble-like beneath  
 the tongue   mantelpiece  
 turpentine bewildered with red  
 were it not for the panting  
 of dogs   silence of celery  
 hurricane birds   barrettes  
 downpour   the corrugated  
 unanswerable   density  
 copulatory song   rafters  
 were it not for the surprise salmon  
 breaking open the surface   steam  
 adjustable knob   mischievous mammals  
 rest stops   plumbing   squash  
 grasp   tears   communicable life

were it not for the swelling of fruit  
 and injury and the body into a body  
 brittle   drafts   the inner electricity  
 that lifts us up off of our knees

## GOD SHARD

In the interest of honesty  
and poor syntax  
this will be streamed from a secret  
excess

in tiny pauses.

That there were influences kills  
any subtlety of attempt.

A literal eye screams for emphasis—  
for a field of field to become crucial,  
convinced that metaphors crucify  
space.

But without you I am  
condensed to a single point,  
lobster tail in my mouth.

An eliminate beyond.  
An illicit still.

The scene is fleeting before resuming,  
lost somewhere between the fervor  
of a minister and abysmal lyricism.

Bodies blow back against  
the vaulted ceiling of our memory,  
leave the soul irreligious & flapping,  
and finally we swallow.

## THE ICE FIELDS

at first water trills the air—  
fragments bleed down,  
silt jotting on vinyl  
siding—a prayer

of accident. roots  
ravenous, but sipping.  
night presses amorously  
against our unsleeping

lawns, untwines lust  
and °C. Then things divide—  
everything is trapped  
under ice, coincides

with silence, Saturn. thin  
parable of belonging.  
nasturtium unopened, double-  
lidded, pits like small beacons

pulsing above the sealed  
sidewalks. darkness hides  
the birds amid icicles,  
and the world yields

one electric cable at a time.  
moonlight becomes  
schizophrenic in the sum,  
glancing off of the eye

of everything, impromptu  
mirror. we are careful, brace  
each other, slip on the surface  
over the surface. we are

warned, hinderlings—  
the asphalt calling to us,  
dangerous little chrysalis  
spreading

## ITHACA FALLS

It is hard to sleep when I smell water falling  
     all around me, the air smoldering  
 with mist, so I walk out again into the night, pilfered light  
 hooked into the elms, to one of the thundering cataracts  
 of this small city of waterfalls. A river daughter hangs her hair  
 over sheer drop off and it tangles into dark knots  
     almost clots under the surface

before loosening into wet kisses along the banks.

    There is no guillotine that can cut *falling* from *fallen*.  
 The present and future roil together, then float as streamers  
 down the long calm of remaining into the past. Further out  
 blond fields of corn give up their ghost when the wind shakes  
     it out of them. Here, spray bewilders the air,  
 carries the rumor of oceans:

everything is shipwreck and habitat, such hovering music.

If I stare at it long enough I can't tell if the page of water  
 is being written or erased, but I know I share its turbulent fidelity,  
 its stuttering. Moonlight tries to intertwine in the fall,  
     but the water just drops  
 its mirrors, one after another, into trespass. And suddenly  
 you are there, my love, the nectar-stained glossa of bees all about you.  
 When I lean back into you, the water dreams of mercy.

Shining translates into soft moss clinging  
 to rock, green gratis. I dip my foot in, watch the water plunge into itself,  
 contradict the notion of a self separate from what it wades through.

    Magnolia petals like bits of eggshell  
 mosey downstream, flood the damp darkness with scent.  
 The flowers, we understand, are made of sparks and wetness,  
  
 and the sun, as ordinary and forgiving as ever, draws near.

[BUT THE RAIN IS FULL OF GHOSTS TONIGHT]

and it has taken something from me,  
 driven my feet from the earth,  
 tendered a gift that displaces me. The water  
 pours through where-I-was like a lesson  
 no one will tell me—a breaking  
 up by filling. Each droplet glints like the eyes  
 I have consented to and then let go of.

Because even your deepest stare could not stitch  
 me to the landscape. This rain, and its interminable  
 music, at once initiates loss and turns from it.  
 I try to gather its signatures, but they come undone  
 like parachutes without bodies. How can I step  
 through this gauzy curtain toward you? What in  
 the world is so adamant about division? Cars  
 continue to butt their way through delicacy, leave  
 tiaras of smoke in the falling.

Love, do not turn blindly from evidence—there  
 it is—time as obvious oblivion . . . and repair.  
 Time touchable, drinkable, blitzed. The mangy  
 cat huddles itself under the cold engine  
 and the awnings are full of compliance. Now  
 is the era of standing apart from it because  
 the wetness makes us suffer too close to eternity.  
 Can you feel the terrific weight of its accumulated  
 utterances? Still, it feels so buoyant in my hand—  
 the umbilical (or elevator shaft) of heaven yielding  
 to space—O innumerable pollinated yeses



## NOTES

CENTRALIA, PA: a small coal town, where a trash fire ignited a vein of coal in 1961. Over fifty years and 40 million dollars later the fire still burns under the town.

THE TRILLING WIRE IN THE BONE: The title is a variation on a line from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (Burnt Norton). These lines belong to: *A bracelet of bright hair about the bone*: John Donne, *The Relic*; *The prayer of the bone on the beach*: T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (The Dry Salvages); *The wonderful fish-like economy of her [the] lower back*, Linda Gregg, *Aphrodite & the Nature of Art*.

FATAL LIGHT AWARENESS PROGRAM: FLAP is an organization, formed in April 1993 to find a solution to birds dying from colliding into skyscrapers. During migration seasons, FLAP volunteers patrol Toronto's downtown core in the early morning hours to rescue live birds and collect the dead ones.

ARCHAEA: A unique group of microorganisms. They are called bacteria (Archaeobacteria) but they are genetically and metabolically different from all other known bacteria. They appear to be living fossils, the survivors of an ancient group of organisms that bridged the gap in evolution between bacteria and the eukaryotes (multicellular organisms). The name Archaea comes from the Greek *archaios* meaning ancient.

ARDENTIA VERBA: (noun, latin) words that burn; glowing language.

[BUT THE RAIN IS FULL OF GHOSTS TONIGHT]: This title comes from Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Sonnet XLIII*.